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Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Founded on a commitment to peace through intercultural dialogue after World War I, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women now represents 25,000 members across 120 countries, championing gender equality, women's empowerment, and prosperity in all areas of life. Recognizing civil society as a vital defender of women's and girls' rights, we work in close collaboration with state actors, stakeholders, NGOs, United Nations bodies, and Special Rapporteurs to reinforce our collective efforts in safeguarding civil society and advocating for universal access across all spheres.

In our global, national, and regional efforts, we address the challenges that hinder the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the achievement of gender equality, and the empowerment of all women and girls in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We highlight critical issues within the Platform's Twelve Areas of Concern – from poverty to armed conflict – that persist as urgent challenges nearly 30 years since its adoption. Recognizing the serious violations of women's human rights, particularly during armed conflicts, climate crises, economic instability, health and food insecurity, and migration, we honour the resilience and leadership of women and girls in advancing peace, the fight to end gender-based violence and climate action.

Women and armed conflict remain at the forefront of our work, as UNESCO and other bodies of the United Nations continue to advocate for women as agents of change within the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (United Nations Resolution 1325). Despite these efforts, women's representation in major peace negotiations remains limited at 13 per cent, even though their involvement increases the likelihood of lasting peace by 30 to 40 per cent. True peace begins with the right to education from an early age and throughout life. We express deep concern over the lack of access to essential resources like healthcare and housing for women, especially those impacted by conflict and forced migration. Prosecution for gender stereotyping related to migrant labour and the abuses faced by refugees is imperative to breaking cycles of violence. Additionally, the role of science in fostering peace is critical, and we must ensure greater representation of women in science and AI fields dedicated to peacebuilding. Women's voices are essential to the development and implementation of Women, Peace, and Security resolutions.

Violence against Women continues to rise. Representing over half of humanity, women are used as weapons of war and victims of violence in conflicts. We condemn all forms of violence against women and call attention to and demand resourced remedies for those who are most at risk of violence in armed conflict; post-conflict situations; humanitarian, social, and economic emergencies; non-state torture; femicide; human trafficking; organ harvesting; forced marriage; and child marriages. These areas of concern must continue to progress against pushback and denial from Member States, non-state actors, including references to domestic, familial and partner violence. Needing immediate policy, protocols and protections is harm resulting from rise of cybercrime, disproportionately perpetrated against women and girls.

Education and training for women in the digital and AI sectors are essential as these fields pose challenges to gender equality. With women making up only 22 per cent of AI professionals and facing disproportionate gender-based violence online, we must prioritize education as a human right and expand STEM access. This will enable women and girls to benefit fully from technological progress and actively shape it.

The world needs science, and science needs women. Yet, rising cybercrime – especially cyber violence and harassment – threatens women’s safety worldwide. As digital spaces become integral to our lives, safeguarding women is essential. Additionally, gaps in digital inclusion for aging women and those with disabilities highlight the need for public-private partnerships to invest in inclusive technologies, ensuring the benefits of innovation reach everyone.

Women in leadership is essential to ensure their presence at the highest levels across all sectors, including major political decision-making roles. Women, often the first to face the impacts of climate change or the challenges of migration with children, must be consulted in developing responsive policies. Their participation in national, regional, and local elections is crucial to this aim. Support for women’s grassroots organizations is also vital, as it amplifies their voices on local issues and provides necessary funding to address these challenges effectively.

Women in poverty face a troubling backlash against their rights, and without accelerated efforts, achieving gender equality worldwide could take nearly 300 years. The number of women in low-income conditions has risen, with early marriage rates increasing and a high proportion of households experiencing vulnerability. Economic instability, conflict, rising interest rates, and institutional failures further restrict many women’s access to a living wage and essential daily needs.

Women and the Economy are critical to success and prosperity of all societies, yet socioeconomic inequalities and ethnic biases are rising. The economic development of regions, reinforcing economic ties among countries and promoting social development, need to be reinforced. Trade and investment, owning land, transfer of property to women must accelerate. Ongoing funds with investment to purchase equipment and services to promote efficiency and safety for women in workforce, coupled with childcare, family, elder care must be acknowledged as women’s unpaid work, including unpaid domestic work. Low economic growth affects dynamism of labour markets that need a resurgence of training, resources, and micro-credit loans. Women networks of economic incubation are struggling for funds, commitments. This requires better data research and funding, including disaggregated gender data focusing on age, disability, migration status, religion, and location. Better data sets will provide useful policy directions for women’s greater inclusion in economy. We stress importance of current data for informed decision-making. Economic development by women accumulates assets and influences institutions and public policies determining growth and development leading to empowerment and prosperity.

Women and the environment are at the forefront of the existential threats posed by climate change, which demands urgent solutions. Women and girls, particularly in vulnerable communities, face heightened risks from climate disasters, limited resource access, and minimal representation in climate-related decision-making. It is essential to integrate women into environmental governance, where their voices, expertise, and leadership are vital to addressing the climate crisis effectively. Ensuring women’s access to land and productive resources also expands opportunities in agriculture and manufacturing, empowering them as owners and leaders. Priority financing for science, technology, and innovations – such as renewable energy and environmental planning – is crucial. Furthermore, women working on environmental issues often face threats and attacks, underscoring the need to protect their freedom of speech and participation.

Women and the media play a critical role in protecting human rights and challenging social norms that condone discrimination and violence against women and girls. NGOs, trade unions, academia, cultural practitioners, faith communities, and the media form the backbone of human rights protection. Yet, civil society’s

defence of these rights often comes at significant personal risk. Excessive regulation, restricted access to decision-makers, and threats to freedoms of assembly, expression, and movement aim to instil fear and silence advocates. While these challenges are region-specific, they disproportionately impact women and girls. We remain steadfast in defending the human rights of all women, even as civil society and faith-based groups face heightened scrutiny and pressure.

Human rights of women ensure full and equal enjoyment of fundamental freedoms, a commitment emphasized by the Beijing Platform for Action, which calls on governments to prioritize these protections. Justice systems must continually review their policies to effectively uphold women's rights. However, critical areas – democratic self-governance, inclusion, and social equity – are under threat. Women and girls require protection against discrimination or punishment based on status, opinions, or beliefs, and equal access must extend to widows, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and migrant women. Initiatives like think tanks, feminist movements, and policies on reproductive rights drive global principles of equality. Specialized justice measures are essential to reduce bias and enhance access for women and girls. National laws must work to eliminate femicide and protect women's rights, aligned with international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which supports their dignity and freedom.

Women and Health must include children, youth and aging populations. We propose concentration on full life cycles of women and girls from birth to death. This includes mental, physical, dental, and all other health areas and issues such as menstruation, menopause, reproductive rights, mental health. Health conversations, policies and funding must include access to sports, arts, entertainment, media and education as human rights. This key to health is imperative among young people, not just for physical well-being. Sports, art, entertainment, and culture are tools for disseminating important values among young people such as equality and acceptance of other cultures. Women and girls depend on health to realize their full potential. This includes proper nutrition, food security, hearing and eyesight, inoculations, disability, and mental health support.

Rights of the Girl Child are crucial for our future. We call on Member States to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by another person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. Actions concerning children, whether undertaken by courts of law or administrative authorities, must put forth best interests of the child. We request continued use of "girl child" gender-specific language to better address, remedy, fund against specific barriers to her existence. We reaffirm our support and demand immediate efforts to combat illicit transfer of children abroad and nationally as child soldiers, child labourers, and trafficked children.

Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women facilitates knowledge exchange among researchers, statisticians, and policymakers, so participants can gain insights into methodologies, best practices, and collaboration with other institutions. By strengthening Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Cooperation through communities of practice, women address challenges such as universal access to high-quality education, equity, and non-discrimination, particularly focusing on reducing gaps between social backgrounds and integrating new paradigms. Further, negotiations for establishment of International Criminal Court gender-specific remedies are needed where civil society can be instrumental. Civil society is a critical watchdog of human rights system, challenging it to perform at its best and to maintain its integrity. This aspect is crucial from local to international as a driving force for reform, often at forefront of establishment of national human rights structures. In this

context, all National Justice Mechanisms must be updated to play a crucial role in non-gender stereotypical litigation. This will further assist in advancing integration of migrants, decreasing discrimination, poverty, xenophobia, bias, and racism. Lastly, we request stronger mechanisms to coordinate various actors and ensure their effective enforcement and implementation of court conviction remedies of women in crime, women's rights as parents in custody, and corrections systems.

Women and girls, their families, and communities, continue to experience challenging times, marked by crises leading to gaps in services, supports, empowerment and equity in all twelve areas of the BPPA. However, with hopeful marks of progress we will increase our advocacy, our global and community efforts. Only a holistic and intersectoral approach with an intercultural and intergenerational model can drive reform into action and activities that must be monitored, measured, and evaluated regularly to save the world. We present our statement as a human right that is universal, indivisible, interdependent and resilient, capable of diplomacy and accelerating advancement.

With Endorsement from the Widows for Peace Through Democracy
